

The Image of the Virgin on the Sinai Hexaptych and the Apse Mosaic of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople

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Among the painted icons connected with the Georgian community of the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, best known is the hexaptych (six-paneled) Menologion with bilingual—Greek and Georgian—inscriptions created in the late eleventh or early twelfth century by the Georgian monk Ioane Tokhabo.¹ Of the calendar icons of this type preserved

at Mount Sinai, the icon is significant for its structure and iconographic program, as well as for its place in the liturgical, theological, historical, and artistic traditions of the eastern Christian world. All the compositions and images on the hexaptych have accompanying inscriptions in both Greek and Georgian, which are written in an identical hand and are contemporaneous with the painted images. The Georgian captions are in the so-called vertical *nuskhuri* (minuscule) script characteristic of eleventh-century inscriptions and manuscript texts.² Although the Greek inscriptions have

1. M. Sotiriou and G. Sotiriou, *Eικόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινά* (Athens, 1956–58), 1: pls. 136–43, 146–49; 2: 121–23, 125–28; K. Weitzmann, “Byzantine Miniature and Icon Painting in the Eleventh Century,” in *Thirteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, Main Papers 7 (Oxford, 1966), 13–14, repr. in *idem, Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, ed. H. Kessler (Chicago and London, 1971), 29–30, figs. 301–3; *idem, The Icon: Holy Images—Sixth to Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1978), 73, pl. 17; *idem, “Icon Programs of the 12th and 13th Centuries at Sinai,” Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ., ser. 4, 13* (1986): 107–12; P. Mijović, *Menolog: Istoriko-umetnicka istratzhivanja* [Menologion: Historical and art historical studies] (Belgrade, 1973), 180; *idem, “Gruzinskie menologi XI po XIV vek”* [Georgian menologies from the 11th to the 14th century] *Zograf* 8 (1977): 17–23; D. Mouriki, “Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century,” in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. K. Manafis (Athens, 1990), 99–100, fig. 16; *idem, “La présence géorgienne au Sinai d’après le témoignage des icônes du monastère de Sainte-Cathérine,”* in *Bυζάντιο και Γεωργία: Καλλιτεχνικές και πολιτιστικές σχέσεις; Συμποσίο* (Athens, 1991), 39–40; S. Kalopissi-Verti, “Painters’ Portraits in Byzantine Art,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ., ser. 4, 17* (1993–94): 134–36; N. Ševčenko, “Marking Holy Time: The Byzantine Calendar Icons,” in *Byzantine Icons: Art, Technique and Technology*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Heraklion, 2002), 52–53; A. Weyl Carr, “Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage in Middle Byzantine Constantinople,” *DOP* 56 (2002): 75–92; N. Trahoulia, “The Truth in Painting: A Refutation of Heresies in

a Sinai Icon,” *JÖB* 52 (2002): 271–85; G. Galavaris, *An Eleventh-Century Hexaptych of the Saint Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai* (Venice and Athens, 2009); M. Lidova, “Creating a Liturgical Space: The Sinai Complex of Icons by Ioannes Tohabo,” in *1st International Symposium of Georgian Culture: Georgian Art in the Context of European and Asian Cultures, June 21–29, 2008; Proceedings* (Tbilisi, 2009), 226–33; *idem, “The Artist’s Signature in Byzantium: Six Icons by Ioannes Tohabo in Sinai Monastery (11th–12th century),” Opera, nomina, historiae: Giornale di cultura artistica* 1 (2009): 77–90; N. Burchuladze, “Georgian Icons at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai: On Georgian-Byzantine Cultural Interrelations,” in *Georgian Art*, 234. For the painter and the icon program see Z. Skhirtladze, “Ioane Tokhabo—sinaze moghvatske kartveli mkhatvari” [Ioane Tokhabo—a Georgian artist active on Sinai], *Literatura da khelovneba* 3 (1998): 61–72; *idem, “Sinas mtsis satselitsdo khatis shedgenilobistvis”* [On the program of the Sinai calendar icon], *Proceedings of the Department of Art History and Theory of Tbilisi State University* 2 (2000): 197–225.

2. For this type of eleventh-century Georgian script and the group of manuscripts copied by this hand, see A. M. Bruni, “Identifying the Autograph of St. George Mtac’mindeli: Palaeographical and

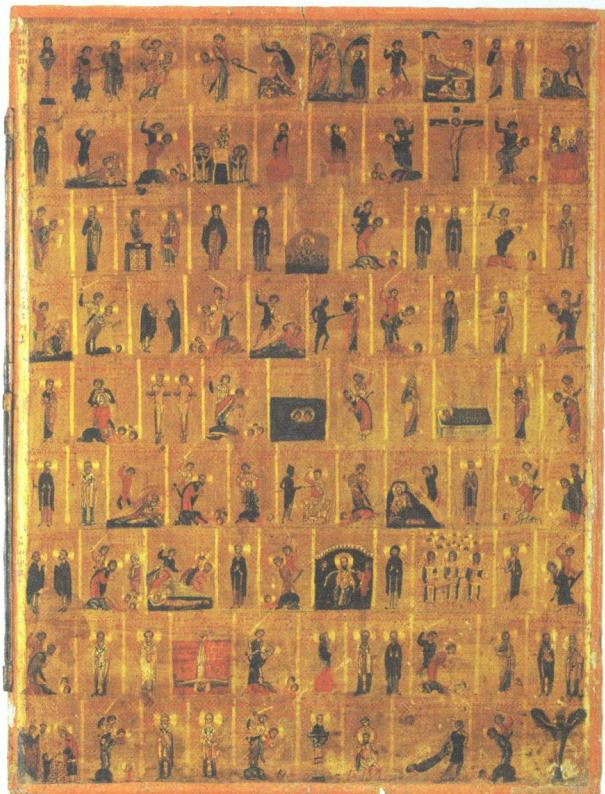


FIG. 1. Leaf of a tetraptych, menologion; a calendar panel showing the martyrs of September, October, and November; Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai (from Manafis, *Sinai* [n. 1 above])

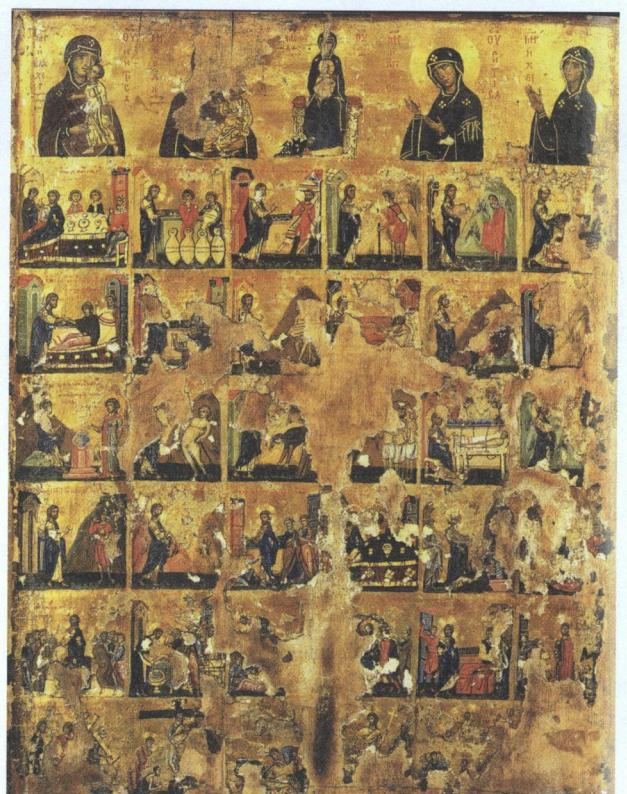


FIG. 2. Sinai hexaptych, panel with images of the Virgin and Christological cycle; Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai (from A. Cutler and J.-M. Spieser, *Byzance Medieval 700-1204* [Paris, 1996]; original photograph by Giovanni Dagli-Orti)

been published,³ the Georgian inscriptions, which provide important evidence of the close relationship between Sinai and Constantinople, as well as the history and the goals of the Georgian community at Sinai, remain unknown.

The core of the hexaptych comprises four calendar panels, each with nine rows of saints and their feast days (fig. 1). A panel at the beginning features a row of five images of the Mother of God, four of which are representations of miraculous icons especially revered in Constantinople; below this is a series of

Christological scenes (fig. 2). The end panel features the Last Judgment.⁴

On the back of each panel a large white cross is depicted against a dark red ground, with Greek capital letters set between the arms of the cross. Above and below each cross are the lines of a Greek twelve-syllable iambic epigram.⁵ The text of the epigrams on the calendar panels runs across all four icons and is divided into sections, with one line in the upper part of the panel and one in the lower part. The panels with the images

4 Sotirou and Sotiriou, *Etxóveg*, 1:128–30, pl. 150.

5 Ibid., 123, 128; Kalopissi-Verti, “Painters’ Portraits,” 134–36. For a full discussion of the epigrams, see W. Horandner, A. Rhöby, and A. Paul, *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung*, vol. 2, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst* (Vienna, 2010), 50–57.

Codicological Notes on Georgian Manuscripts of the Iveron Monastery,” in *Georgian Athanites and Christian Civilization*, ed. D. Muskhelishvili (New York, 2013), 113–20.

3 Galavaris, *Eleventh-Century Hexaptych*, 25–138.

of the Virgin and the panel with the Last Judgment, however, each have independent poems, with two lines running above the cross and two running below on the panel with the images of the Virgin, and four lines running above and two below on the panel with the Last Judgment. The high artistic standard of the hexaptych is attested by the content and style of these iambic verses.

The most important information found in the epigrams is the name of the artist and donor of the hexaptych: the monk Ioane Tokhabi.⁶ This appears in the seven-line Georgian inscription on the Last Judgment panel, below the now-lost figure of Christ enthroned. It was written in his own hand, in a straight *nuskhuri* identical to the inscriptions accompanying the images. The text is on the gold ground between and below the two groups of Apostles; it is divided by the river of fire issuing from the Lord's throne (figs. 3 and 4):

Գ ծփա Դ	Գ թ մղամիղծ ծան
բարձւն ց հինւ	ծ ց թ ո ղ մ ն մ կ տ
ծողնւ ծ ւ հ ւ ո ւ	ո ա ն ւ մ ա մ չ պ
ի ր ո մ ո ւ ն ս պ ի	ո ր ո մ ո ւ թ ա մ ց ո
պ ո ր ո ւ ց ը լ ւ ն դ ա	մ ի ղ ծ մ ա ն ո ր ո ւ ն
ց ի ր ո ւ ծ է կ ո ւ ո ւ թ ա	ց ի ր ո ւ ն ւ պ ո ր ո ւ ն
ս պ ւ ո ւ ն ծ ա հ ի ւ ն ա ւ ա	հ ո հ ո ւ թ ա պ ա ց ո ւ ն է ի :
+ m(eu)p(e)o I[esu]	
slvasa sh(e)n[sa]	Q(rist)]e, meored mo
dghesa mas nats	d(i)d(e)bit ghirs mq'av
nittasa sur	ilsa marjue
beli khat(i)sa meo	vilit momge
sh(e)n(i)sa da q'(ove)lta	red moslvisa
ts[(mida)ta]	sh(e)ntasa ughirsi
khutses mon[azo]	ni I(ovan)e Tokhabi,
	a(me)n

Lord Jesus Christ, allow me to stay at your right hand at your Second Coming in glory, the desirous donor of an icon of your Second Coming and all saints, the humble Hieromonk Ioane Tokhabi, Amen.⁷

6 The fact that Ioane was both the painter and the donor of the hexaptych is evidenced by the contents of the Greek epigrams and the Georgian dedicatory inscription, as discussed below.

7 The presence of a Georgian donor's inscription on the icon of the Second Coming was noted early (Sotirou and Sotiriou, *Eixóveç*, 2:128), though its content remained unknown for a long time. The first publication of this inscription has certain flaws (V. Silogava,

The scale and artistic quality of this and the other extensive inscriptions, composed especially for the icon either by Ioane Tokhabi or with his direct participation,⁸ reveal him to be one of the most accomplished figures of the Sinai Georgian community at the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century. His profound erudition and broad horizons, his thorough expertise in the fine arts, which is evident in both the iconography and style of the icon and in Greek language and versification, also distinguish him from the Georgian figures active at foreign centers in this period.⁹

"Sinas mtis kartuli tsartserebi" [Georgian inscriptions of Mount Sinai], *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* [19 October 1984]: 11). Among these the lacuna following the artist's name is essential. Since 1991 Ioane's surname was given in publications of the icon as თოხაბი (Tokhabi) (cf. Mouriki, "La présence géorgienne au Sinai," 39). It was corrected in 1998 (cf. Skhirtladze, "Ioane Tokhabi," 70, fig. 1); however the publication was in Georgian, and until recently it remained unknown to western scholarship. Lidova has published an English translation of the dedicatory inscription based on my 1998 article, but it is erroneous; see Lidova, "Creating a Liturgical Space," 231; eadem, "Artist's Signature in Byzantium," 86.

8 There is no direct evidence that Ioane himself composed the poems and wrote the captions to the images, although he was, no doubt, directly or indirectly responsible for them. This is suggested by passages in the poems on the backs of the panels: "having successfully painted a four-part column of celebrated martyrs together with a host of prophets and theologians, of priests and monks, Ioannes committed it to the ruler"; "the insignificant Ioannes has painted these holy icons and has given them to the church"; "having appropriately painted in red colors thy world-redeeming Passion, O Word, together with thy miracles, surprising mind and speech, Ioannes, the monk, asks for forgiveness of his sins." Cf. Kalopissi-Verti, "Painters' Portraits in Byzantine Art," 134–36.

9 No other evidence is found concerning Ioane Tokhabi in sources related to the Georgian colony at Mount Sinai. The number of monks bearing the name Ioane is rather large in the colophons of Sinai's Georgian manuscripts. However, only two coincide with the conjectural period of the creation of the hexaptych icon. The names are found in Cod. Sin. Georg. 80, an ascetic-hagiographic collection considered to have been copied in the eleventh century (I. Javakhishvili, *Sinis mtis kartul khelnatserta aghts eriloba* [Description of Georgian manuscripts of Mount Sinai] [Tbilisi, 1947], 132–37; G. Garitte, *Catalogue des manuscrits géorgiens littéraires du Mont Sinai*, CSCO 165, Subsidia 9 [Louvain, 1956], 237–53), and Cod. Sin. Georg. 81, a gospel book generally dated to the twelfth-thirteenth century (N. Marr, *Opisanie gruzinskikh rukopisei Sinaiskogo monastyrja* [Description of Georgian manuscripts of Sinai Monastery] [Moscow-Leningrad, 1940], 214–19; Garitte, *Catalogue des manuscrits géorgiens*, 253–58; in connection with Amba Ioane, the Georgian mentioned in the Arabic colophon of the manuscript, see R. Gvaramia, "Kartuli sinuri khelnatserebis arabuli minat serebi" [Arabic colophons of Sinai Georgian manuscripts],



FIG. 3. Sinai hexaptych, dedicatory inscription of the donor and painter, Ioane Tokhabi (photo by the author)

FIG. 4.
Sinai hexaptych,
schematic drawing of
dedicatory inscription
(drawing by the author)

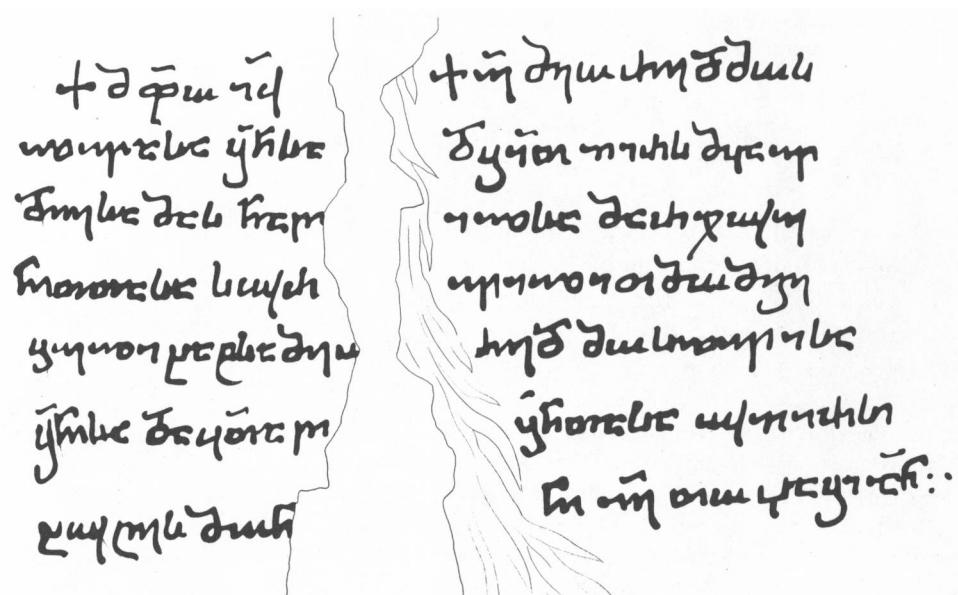




FIG. 5. Sinai hexaptych, row of images of the Virgin (from M. Vassilaki, *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* [Athens, 2000]; photo by Spyros Panayotopoulos)

The Sinai hexaptych is one of the earliest pictorial works to combine an entire year's fixed festivals and a paschal cycle.¹⁰ The unprecedented row of the capital's most venerated images of the Mother of God, however, is its most important element. The panel on which this appears is divided into seven registers. The somewhat taller upper register features five images of the Virgin (fig. 5). In the center of the top row, the Virgin and Child are depicted full length and seated on a throne, while the diminutive figure of Ioane, bare-headed and in a monk's habit, kneels at the left (figs. 14 and 15).

Flanking this are two pairs of miraculous images of the Virgin related to the most important sanctuaries of Constantinople. To the left are the Blachernitissa (figs. 6 and 7) and the Hodegetria (figs. 8 and 9), and to the right the Hagiosoritissa (figs. 10 and 11) and the Cheimeute (figs. 12 and 13),¹¹ each identified by inscriptions in both Greek and Georgian. They are

arranged so that in the two left-hand images the Virgin wears a red *maphorion* and holds the Christ Child, while in the right-hand images she is clad in a blue *maphorion* and appears alone. The six registers below contain Christ's miracles in the upper four registers and a Passion cycle in the lower two registers, with six episodes in each row. Here, too, the images have accompanying inscriptions. The images of the Mother of God on this panel have been discussed extensively. Annemarie Weyl Carr has considered them in the context of the pilgrimage centers of Constantinople, noting the complex relationship between the iconographies and the epithets.¹² Nicolette Trahoulia links them to Byzantine polemical discourses on icons and eleventh- and twelfth-century theology, although she finds it difficult to account for the simultaneous presence of the Virgin and the Christological cycle in theological terms.¹³

Mravaltavi: *Proceedings of the Institute of Manuscripts, Georgian Academy of Sciences* 9 [1981]: 77–78). To be sure, in the numerous colophons to both manuscripts Ioane is named as the copyist, yet the paleography differs appreciably from the straight *nuskhuri* highly characteristic of the hexaptych's donor inscription and explanatory captions. This makes it impossible that they could be the same Ioane named on the hexaptych.

10 In the unusually vast Christological cycle presented on the panel, relevant themes of Great Lent and Eastertide are inserted. Cases of uniting the paschal cycle with the annual cycle of the liturgical calendar occur elsewhere; cf. Mijović, *Menolog*, 117–28, 194–96, 205; idem, “Gruzinskie menologii s XI po XIV vek,” 20 (both n. 1 above).

11 Apart from the Sinai icon, the only evidence for the Virgin Cheimeute is Constantine Porphyrogennetos' *Book of Ceremonies*; see Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. A. Moffatt and M. Tall, vol. 1 (Canberra, 2012), 170. For the

mid-eleventh-century enamel icon from Maastricht, see K. Wessel, *Byzantine Enamels* (Shannon, 1969), 119–20, fig. 39.

12 Weyl Carr, “Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage” (n. 1 above), 75–81.

13 Trahoulia (“Truth in Painting” [n. 1 above], 278–85) attempts to show that the panel is not a part of the polyptych but an independent icon created not earlier than the twelfth century (*ibid.*, 278–79). However, neither iconographic nor stylistic arguments are convincing. It is clear that the icon created by Ioane Tokhabia was meant to be a hexaptych and not a single panel. It was not a response to the Bogomil heresy on the subject of Christology, as Trahoulia believes, but a statement for a domestic audience emphasizing ties between Sinai and Constantinople. Nor, as she suggests, did Ioane's ethnic origins predispose him to refuting heresy: Georgia was unaffected by iconoclasm and Ioane was above all a monk of Sinai.



FIG. 6. Sinai hexaptych, image of the Virgin Blachernitissa (from Vassilaki, *Mother of God*; photo by Spyros Panayotopoulos)



FIG. 7. Schematic drawing of Sinai hexaptych's image of the Virgin Blachernitissa (drawing by the author)



FIG. 8. Sinai hexaptych, image of the Virgin Hodegetria (from Vassilaki, *Mother of God*; photo by Spyros Panayotopoulos)



FIG. 9. Schematic drawing of Sinai hexaptych's image of the Virgin Hodegetria (drawing by the author)



FIG. 10. Sinai hexaptych, image of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa (from Vassilaki, *Mother of God*; photo by Spyros Panayotopoulos)

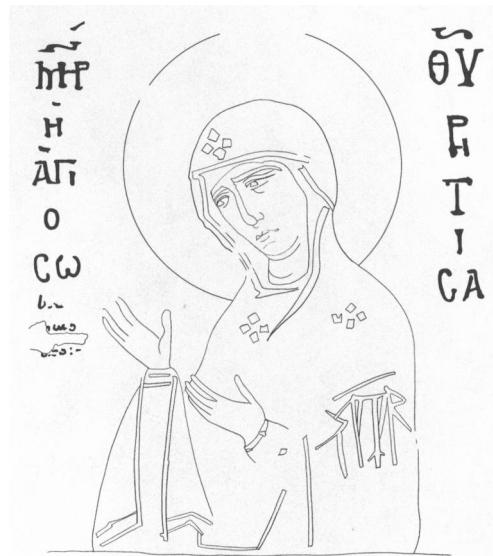


FIG. 11. Schematic drawing of Sinai hexaptych's image of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa (drawing by the author)

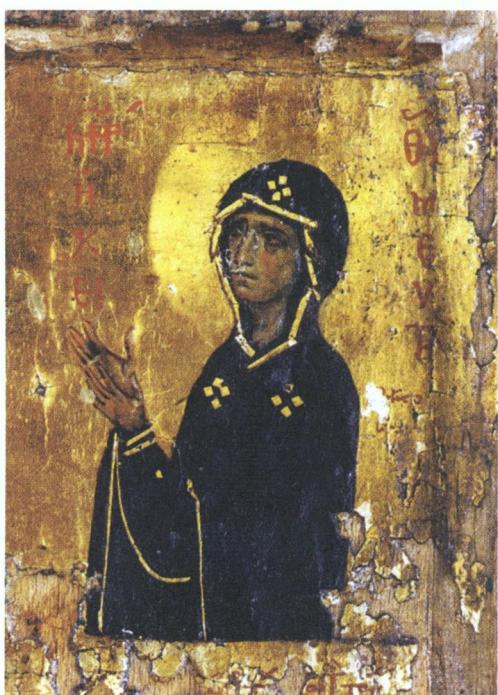


FIG. 12. Sinai hexaptych, image of the Virgin Cheimeute (from Vassilaki, *Mother of God*; photo by Spyros Panayotopoulos)



FIG. 13. Schematic drawing of Sinai hexaptych's image of the Virgin Cheimeute (drawing by the author)



FIG. 14. Sinai hexaptych, central image of the Virgin (from Vassilaki, *Mother of God*; photo by Spyros Panayotopoulos)

The central image of the Mother of God has been largely overlooked (figs. 14 and 15).¹⁴ This is mainly because its Greek inscription, which has been published several times,¹⁵ is quite general in character, describing her simply as Μῆτηρ Θεοῦ (Μήτηρ Θεοῦ, Mother of God). The Georgian inscription, which provides a more precise identification, has been ignored. Thus the image has been identified in the scholarly literature as an “unnamed seated Virgin and Child.”¹⁶ There have been attempts to understand its meaning in more specific

14 Since the hexaptych was first published by G. and M. Sotiriou it has received barely a passing mention. See Sotiriou and Sotiriou, *Eικόνες*, 2:125–26; Weitzmann, “Byzantine Miniature and Icon Painting,” 14; idem, *Icon*, 73; Mouriki, “La présence géorgienne au Sinai,” 39; Kalopissi-Verti, “Painters’ Portraits,” 134; Skhirtladze, “Ioane Tokhabi,” 61; Trahoulia, “Truth in Painting,” 271; Weyl Carr, “Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage,” 77; Galavaris, *Eleventh-Century Hexaptych*, 25 (all items n. 1 above).

15 Sotiriou and Sotiriou, *Eικόνες*, 2:125; Galavaris, *Eleventh-Century Hexaptych*, 25–26.

16 Ševčenko, “Marking Holy Time,” 56.

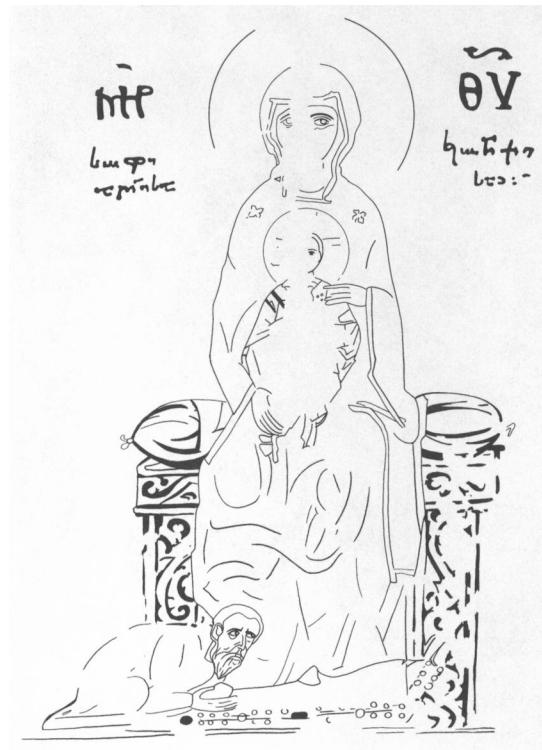


FIG. 15. Schematic drawing of Sinai hexaptych’s central Image of the Virgin (drawing by the author)

terms. Kurt Weitzmann, for example, says this Virgin “is known under the name of Platytera or Nikopoia, or still other names.”¹⁷ Weyl Carr identifies her as the Virgin of the Burning Bush—a reference to the Sinai monastery itself.¹⁸ Trahoulia views the image as “the type . . . found in the apse of Byzantine churches, as for example the apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul,” adding that because it is a “common image of the Virgin” and “not labeled as a particular icon type . . . the viewer is meant to interpret this image not as a depiction of an icon, but as a depiction of the Virgin herself.”¹⁹ The same idea is repeated in the posthumously published work of George Galavaris, who similarly stressed that “this is not a representation of a miraculous icon but rather . . . a general iconographic type often found in the apse of a church as for example

17 Weitzmann, “Byzantine Miniature and Icon Painting,” 14.

18 Weyl Carr, “Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage,” 77.

19 Trahoulia, “Truth in Painting,” 271–72, and 278.



FIG. 16. Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey, Apse conch; Virgin and child enthroned, detail: central figures, 1964. (The Byzantine Institute and Dumbarton Oaks Fieldwork Records and Papers, MS.BZ.004-1979.0602; photo by Ernest Hawkins)

in the church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.”²⁰ Though Galavaris assumed icons had been used as models for the flanking images, he thought “the Platytera in the centre . . . seems to point to an apse decoration.”²¹

The Greek and Georgian inscriptions on the five images of the Virgin and their translations are as follows:

FAR LEFT (FIGS. 6, 7)

ΜΡ ΘV H ΒΛΑΧΕΡΝΗΤΙCA
M(ήτη)ρ Θ(εο)ῦ ἡ Βλαχερνήτισα
The Virgin Blachernitissa

VLAKEURNISAI
[Image] of Blachernae

LEFT (FIGS. 8, 9)

ΜΡ .. H ΟΔΗ..TPIA
M(ήτη)ρ [Θ(εο)ῦ] ἡ Ὁδη[γή]τρια
The Virgin Hodegetria

ODIGITRIISAI
[Image] of Hodegetria

RIGHT (FIGS. 10, 11)

ΜΡ ΘV H ΑΓΙΟCΩΡΗΤΙCA
M(ήτη)ρ Θ(εο)ῦ ἡ Αγιοσωρήτισα
The Virgin Hagiosoritissa

SO[R]OISAI
[Image] of Soros

FAR RIGHT (FIGS. 12, 13)

ΜΡ ΘV H ΧΕΙΜΕVTH
M(ήτη)ρ Θ(εο)ῦ ἡ Χειμεντή
The Virgin Cheimeute

[M]INAISAI
[Image done] in enamel

CENTER (FIGS. 14, 15)

ΜΡ ΘV
M(ήτη)ρ Θ(εο)ῦ
The Mother of God

SOPIA TS[MID]ISA KONQISAI
[Image] of the conch of Saint Sophia

Although the inscriptions on the images to the right and left are virtually identical in both languages, those on the central image differ. Here the Greek is general, but the Georgian specifies that the image represents the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia (fig. 16), an especially sacred image from the sanctuary of the foremost church of the empire’s capital.

The collective meaning of the hexaptych’s images and their relation to contemporary realities—including the calendar of the Orthodox Church and the practice of its illustration—demands a separate study. However, the central image of the Virgin, as identified by the Georgian inscription, on the first panel of the hexaptych is an important visual attestation to the conch mosaic at Hagia Sophia.



Though the conch mosaic in the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (fig. 16) was not covered until about the end of the seventeenth century, little visual evidence of its original appearance and transformations over the centuries survives. The textual records regarding the mosaics are well known,²² but until now the earliest visual sources were a sketch by Grelot (1672) (fig. 17),²³ and drawings by Loos (1710) (fig. 18),²⁴ neither of which

22 See accounts of the mosaics of Hagia Sophia before 1453 (C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* [Toronto, 1986], 187ff.) and after 1453 (idem, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul*, DOS 8 [Washington, D.C., 1962], 117–43). Besides the indications given mostly by Byzantine sources, useful material is provided by the Russian pilgrims, who refer both to mural mosaics and to coins affixed to the walls at a lower level. These references do not touch on the conch mosaics; see G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers in Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, DOS 19 (Washington, D.C., 1984); idem, “Russian Pilgrims in Constantinople,” *DOP* 56 (2003): 93–108.

23 Cf. Mango, *Materials*, fig. 2.

24 Ibid., figs. 3 and 90.

20 Galavaris, *Eleventh-Century Hexaptych*, 25.

21 Ibid., 139.

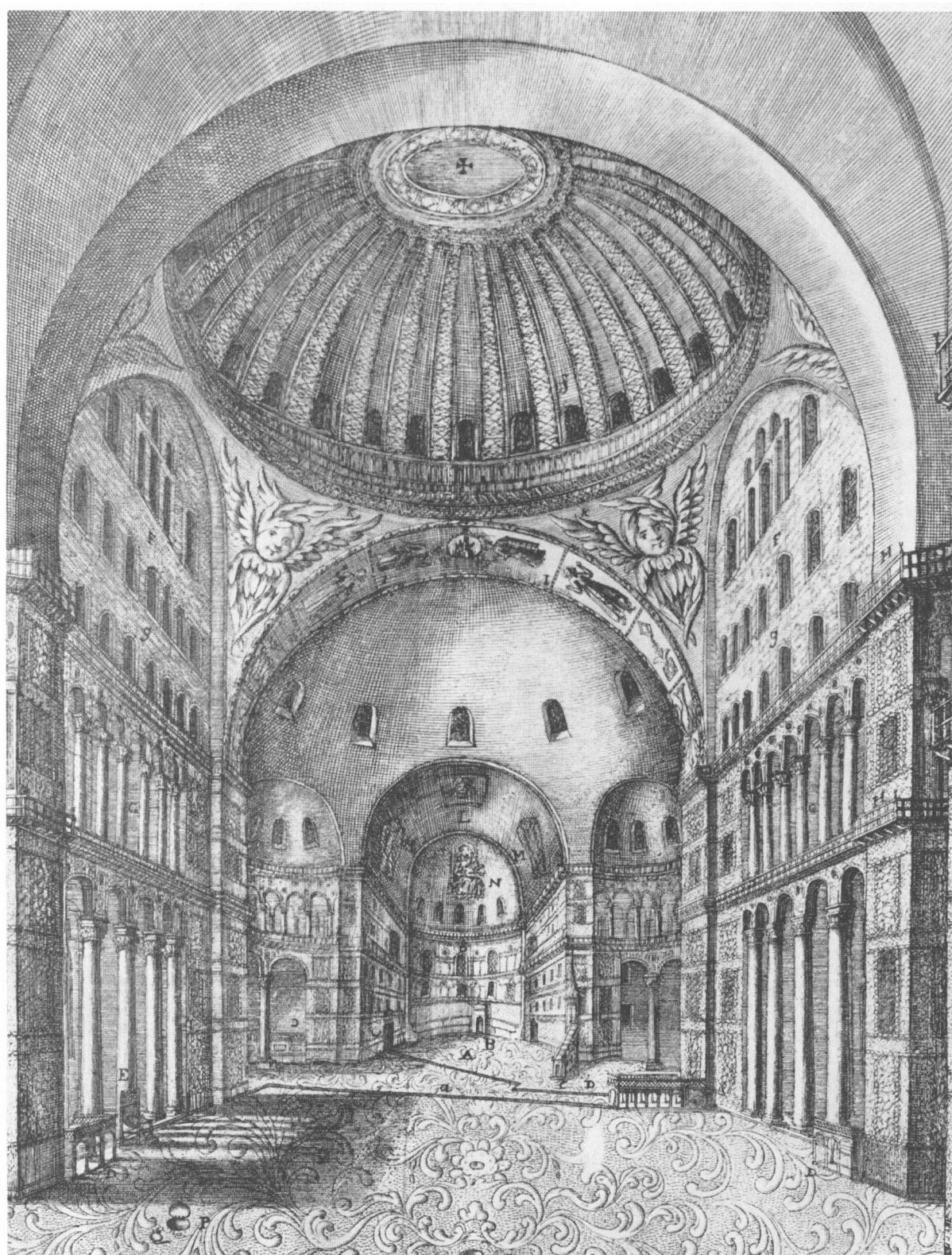


FIG. 17. Interior view of Hagia Sophia, detail of an engraving by William Joseph Grelot, 1672, published in *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople* (Paris, 1680)

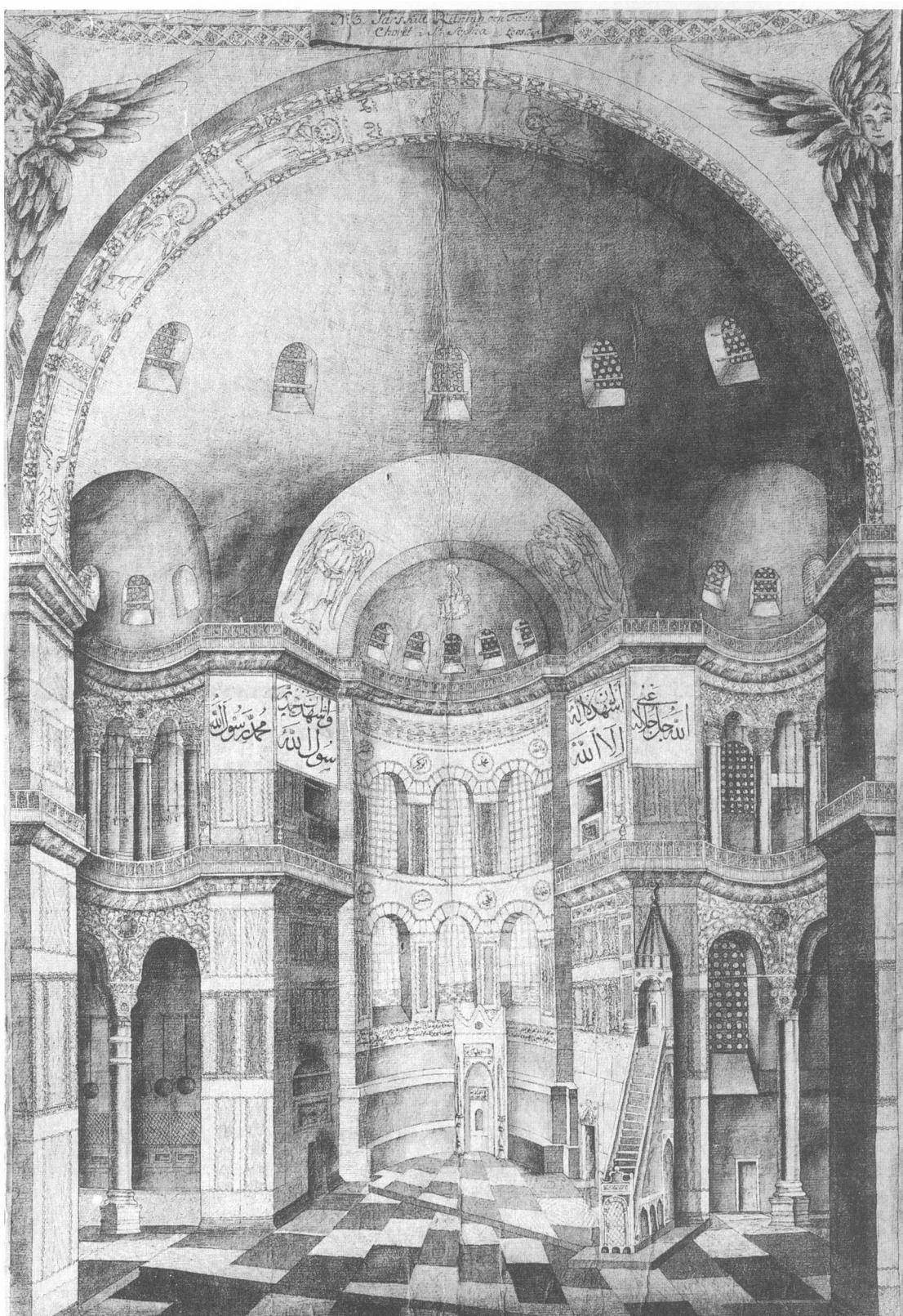


FIG. 18. Interior of Hagia Sophia, drawing by Cornelius Loos, 1710; National Museum, Stockholm, Sweden

shows the central image of the conch very clearly. Thus the Sinai hexaptych presents some of the earliest evidence for the dating of the apse mosaic and for its appearance at the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century.

Since it was uncovered, first by the Fossati brothers in 1847–48²⁵ and much later, in 1935–39, by Thomas Whittemore,²⁶ the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia has become one of the foremost monuments of Byzantium. Nevertheless, its date, iconographic scheme, and style have continued to be the subject of scholarly debate—indeed the mosaic remains “a curious reflection on how little we know about Byzantine art,” as Cyril Mango once commented.²⁷ While the uncovering and restoration of the mosaic in the 1930s and further examination of it from scaffolding in 1964 shed light on much noteworthy material, including the possible date of the mosaic’s creation, questions remain.²⁸

The date proposed for the creation of the apse mosaics ranges from the eighth to the fourteenth century, with the majority of scholars believing that they were executed some time after the end of Iconoclasm, in the third quarter of the ninth century. The mosaics have been linked to a homily by Patriarch Photios delivered in Hagia Sophia on 29 March 867,²⁹ and their date defined by those of his patriarchate (858–867 and 877–886) and the dates of the reign of Emperor Basil I (867–886).³⁰ Nevertheless, other dates have been

25 Ibid., 6–21, 105–16; N. Teteriatnikov, *Mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: The Fossati Restoration and the Work of the Byzantine Institute* (Washington, D.C., 1998), 8–30.

26 Teteriatnikov, *Mosaics of Hagia Sophia*, 31–68; R. S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia: 1850–1950* (Chicago and London, 2004), 155–86.

27 C. Mango, “Documentary Evidence on the Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia,” *BZ* 47 (1954): 395.

28 C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, “The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: Report on Work Carried Out in 1964,” *DOP* 19 (1965): 113–51.

29 C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 286–96.

30 C. R. Morey, *Medieval Art* (New York, 1942), 107; idem, “The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia,” *BMMA*, n.s., 2 (1944): 205–6; V. Lazarev, *Istorija vizantijskoi zhivotopisi* [History of Byzantine painting], 1st ed. (Moscow, 1947), 84–86; 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1986), 71–72, 216; O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration* (London, 1948), 26; S. Der Nersessian, “Le décor des églises du IX^e siècle,” in *Actes du VI^e congrès international d'études byzantines*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1951), 315–16, repr. in eadem, *Études byzantines et arméniennes* (Louvain, 1973),

suggested for parts or all of the mosaics. Several scholars would like to date the apse mosaic earlier.³¹ Others date it much later, arguing that it must have been created in the second half of the fourteenth century, either in the years following the earthquakes of 1343 and 1344,³² or 1353–55,³³ or after 1355,³⁴ or ca. 1383.³⁵ It has also been suggested that only the images of the archangels have survived from the ninth-century mosaic,

315–20; C. Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei, 4.–8. Jahrhundert*, 1st ed. (Wiesbaden, 1960), 186–87, pl. XIX.1; Mango, *Materials*, 80–83, 93–95; Mango and Hawkins, “Apse Mosaics,” 113–51; V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina* (Turin, 1967), 142–43, 355; R. Cormack, “The Arts During the Age of Iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 147; P. Speck, “Photios über das Apsismosaik der Hagia Sophia,” *Hellenika* 30 (1977–78): 399–403; R. Cormack, “Interpreting the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul,” *AH* 4, no. 2 (1981): 135–38; idem, “Painting after Iconoclasm,” in *The Byzantine Eye: Studies in Art and Patronage* (London, 1989), 14; I. Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became ‘Meter Theou’,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 170; J. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, 1997), 176; R. Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 2000), 118–20; idem, “The Mother of God in the Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople,” in *The Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Geneva, 2000), 338; Nelson, *Hagia Sophia*, 10; N. Teteriatnikov, “Hagia Sophia, Constantinople: Religious Images and their Functional Context after Iconoclasm,” *Zograf* 30 (2004–5): 9–13.

31 N. Oikonomides, “Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic of St. Sophia,” *DOP* 39 (1985): 114; G. Galassi, *Roma o Bisanzio*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1953), 307–11; idem, “Recenti ricuperi a Sancta Sofia et le data dei mosaici,” *FR* 7 (1961): 27–37; cf. Mango, “Documentary Evidence,” 395, no. 2; T. Whittemore, “On the Dating of Some Mosaics of Hagia Sophia,” *BMMA* (Summer, 1946): 34–45; A. Frolov, “La mosaïque murale byzantine,” *BSL* 12 (1951): 189–90; A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin: Dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957), 185, 189–92.

32 G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (London, 1963), 138.

33 M. Bernabò, “L’arte bizantina dopo l’iconoclastia e la datazione dei mosaici nell’abside di Santa Sofia a Constantinopoli,” in *Intorno al sacro volto: Genova, Bisanzio e il Mediterraneo (secoli XI–XIV)*, ed. A. R. Calderoni Masetti, C. Dufour Bozzo, and G. Wolf (Venice, 2007), 45–47.

34 G. Galavaris, “The Representation of the Virgin and Child on a ‘Thokos’ on Seals of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchs,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.*, ser. 4, 2 (1960–61): 153–81; idem, “Observations on the Date of the Apse Mosaic of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople,” in *Actes du XII^e congrès international d'études byzantines*, vol. 3 (Ochrid, 1964), 107–10; V. Laurent, *Corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, vol. 5, pt. 1 (Paris, 1963), no. 45.

35 Oikonomides, “Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic,” 113.

while the image of the Mother of God is a result of the fourteenth-century restoration.³⁶

Nicolas Oikonomides in particular was puzzled by certain discrepancies between the description of the image of the Mother of God in Photios's homily and the actual mosaic in the apse of Hagia Sophia: Photios describes her as standing, while the mosaic depicts her seated.³⁷ A dream described by the Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos in the Life of the Patriarch Isidoros Buchiras (1347–1349) compiled in 1355–63, similarly speaks of an image of a standing Virgin seen by Isidoros on 6 January 1347.³⁸ It is assumed that these texts refer to the sanctuary mosaic, and supporters of an early date attribute the discrepancy to the “fluidity of the Byzantine language.”³⁹

Advocates of a later date for the mosaic focus on the appreciable damage done to the eastern part of the church by the mid-fourteenth-century earthquakes. These presumably affected the apse mosaic, which would have been renewed subsequently.⁴⁰ Arguments in favor of the later date rely on the evidence of the seals of the Patriarchs of Constantinople, which, beginning with the seal of Patriarch Neilos of Constantinople (1380–1388), show the Virgin seated on a *thokos*, reflecting the iconography of the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia.⁴¹

The style of the mosaic has also been seen as representing either the tendencies of the post-iconoclastic period or the essential aspects of Palaiologan art.⁴²

36 D. Talbot Rice, *Arte di Bisanzio* (Florence, 1959), 75–76; J. Beckwith, *The Art of Constantinople: An Introduction to Byzantine Art 330–1453* (London, 1961), 62–63, 145. The complexity of the question is seen in the fact that later Beckwith altered his view and pronounced the entire mosaic to have been created in the ninth century; cf. idem, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Harmondsworth, 1970), 86–87.

37 Oikonomides, “Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic,” 111–12.

38 “Zhitija dvukh vselenskikh patriarkhov XIV v., svv. Afanasija I i Isidora I” [Lives of the two ecumenical patriarchs of the fourteenth century, SS. Athanasios I and Isidoros I], as in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Zapiski Istoriko-Filologicheskogo Fakulteta Imperatorskogo S.-Peterburgskogo Universiteta* 76 (1905): 110–15; cf. Mango and Hawkins, “Apse Mosaics,” 146–47; Oikonomides, “Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic,” 112.

39 Mango and Hawkins, “Apse Mosaics,” 143; Cf. R. J. H. Jenkins’s review of Mango’s *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, *BZ* 52 (1959): 106–8.

40 Galavaris, “The Representation of the Virgin,” 153–81; idem, “Observations,” 107–10.

41 Laurent, *Corpus des sceaux*, no. 45.

42 Bernabò, “L’arte bizantina dopo l’iconoclastia,” 40, 45–46.

Several complex scenarios have been suggested to account for the contradictory evidence. In Galavaris’s view, originally the apse must have contained a standing Hodegetria, which, by the late tenth or early eleventh century—that is, soon after the earthquake of 989—was replaced by a representation of the Mother of God seated on a *thokos*. This representation must have been replaced—without alteration of the iconography—by the present one in the second half of the fourteenth century, after the 1346 earthquake that seriously damaged the eastern portion of the church.⁴³ In contrast, Oikonomides has proposed that the current image of the Virgin must have been executed during the iconodule interlude of 787–815, probably between 787 and 797. It would have been covered during second Iconoclasm, and in 867 the image of the Virgin Hodegetria described by Photios executed on the new plaster; the earthquakes of 1343 and 1344 then revealed the original image of the Mother of God on a *thokos*.⁴⁴

Discussion has continued for decades without resolution.⁴⁵ While it might be thought that arguments for dating the apse mosaic to any period other than the ninth century were long ago discredited, controversy remains. The great majority of publications accept the ninth-century date without further discussion,⁴⁶ but some scholars continue to present extensive arguments in favor of a later date.⁴⁷

The Sinai hexaptych does not provide answers to all questions regarding the dating of the apse mosaic at Hagia Sophia, but it does confirm that the image of the seated Virgin was there in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, and it suggests its probable appearance. This does not rule out the possibility that the original image was a standing Hodegetria that was replaced in the late tenth or early eleventh century with an image of the Mother of God on a *thokos*. It does, however, rule out the possibility that the image of a standing Virgin was replaced with a seated Virgin in the fourteenth century. It also confirms

43 Galavaris, “The Representation of the Virgin,” 153ff.; idem, “Observations,” 107–10.

44 Oikonomides, “Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic,” 113.

45 Mango, *Materials*, 82–83, 94–95; Lazarev, *Istorija vizantiiskoi zhivopisi* (2nd ed.), 71–72, 216.

46 Teteriatnikov, “Hagia Sophia, Constantinople,” 9, 11.

47 Bernabò, “L’arte bizantina dopo l’iconoclastia,” 37–47.

Viktor Lazarev's suggestion that the seated Virgin in the apse was replicated in Hagia Sophia's vestibule mosaic, where she appears between Constantine and Justinian.⁴⁸ If this is indeed the case—as now seems likely—the vestibule mosaic should be considered another piece of visual evidence for the early existence of the image of the enthroned Virgin in the conch. It also raises some challenging questions about possible meanings associated with the apse mosaic in middle Byzantine Constantinople.

While the minute image painted by Ioane Tokhabo on the Sinai hexaptych replicates features of Hagia Sophia's apse mosaic, there are differences: on the Sinai icon, the Mother of God is seated on a single cushion instead of two and the position of her hands on the child's body is reversed, so that her left hand is on his shoulder and her right hand is on his feet; the direction of the child's legs has also been shifted from right to left.⁴⁹ None of this is surprising considering the disparity in size between the two representations and the great distance between the places in which they were made. At the same time it should be borne in mind that the images of the Virgin on the hexaptych panel, with the exception of the Hodegetria, "seem to function above all through their names, which refer less to images than to sites,"⁵⁰ and, accordingly, conform less strictly to their usual iconographic types.



Overall the panel "reflects a bouquet of epithets and images honoring Mary, so suggesting icons that served not as accessories to a site but as objects of pilgrimage in their own rights."⁵¹ It is significant that on the hexaptych panel, the Mother of God from the conch of Hagia Sophia is shown on a par with the four most venerated and miraculous icons of Constantinople. The importance of the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia on the Sinai panel is underlined by its centrality among images from the capital's major Marian pilgrimage sites,⁵² and

48 Lazarev, *Istorija vizantiiskoi zhivopisi*, 2nd ed., 216, n. 70.

49 As the painting is entirely flaked, nothing can be said about the child's gesture or the attribute in his hand. In the mosaic he holds a scroll.

50 Weyl Carr, "Icons and the Object of Pilgrimage," 81.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

by the placement of the figure of the donor and painter, Ioane, at the Virgin's feet. In addition to the traditional meanings associated with representing donors' figures on icons,⁵³ the depiction of a Sinai monk at the feet of the Virgin from the apse of Hagia Sophia would have pointed to the contemporary importance of Constantinople, which was protected by the Mother of God, as well as signaling the close relationship between Sinai and Constantinople.

The distinctive placement of the apse image of Hagia Sophia on the Sinai panel suggests the importance of the church and its mosaic in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Hagia Sophia—"a treasure hoard of relics and a building of mythical renown"⁵⁴—remained the holiest place in and the foremost symbol of the Christian Orthodox world. Among other numerous testimonies to its status, those on pilgrimage to shrines of Constantinople began their itinerary with a visit to Hagia Sophia.⁵⁵ The distinction of the church remained unchanged even in the later period, as the building came to represent imperial authority and the idea of empire.⁵⁶

There are no concrete historical data that the hexaptych was made at Sinai, but beginning with George and Maria Sotiriou all authors have attributed it to Sinai on grounds of style. At the same time, there are clear links between the Sinai hexaptych and the capital of Byzantium.⁵⁷ The choice of saints for the calendar icon, for example, was based on the Synaxarion of the Great Church and presented the feasts in the order in which they were celebrated in Constantinople. The hexaptych's connection with the holy places of Constantinople seems peculiar, however,

53 Kalopissi-Verti, "Painters' Portraits," 129–42; N. Ševčenko, "Close Encounters: Contact between Holy Figures and the Faithful as Represented in Byzantine Works of Art," in *Byzance et les images*, ed. A. Guillou and J. Durand (Paris, 1994), 257–85; eadem, "The Representation of Donors and Holy Figures on Four Byzantine Icons," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.*, ser. 4, 17 (1993–94): 157–64; A. Weyl Carr, "Donors in the Frames of the Icons: Living in the Borders of Byzantine Art," *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006): 189–98.

54 Majeska, "Russian Pilgrims in Constantinople," 104.

55 So it was in the twelfth century (Antony of Novgorod) as well as later in the fifteenth century (the monk-deacon Zosima). Cf. *ibid.*, 94, 102, 104; cf. *idem*, *Russian Travelers in Constantinople*, 183 (n. 22 above).

56 R. S. Nelson, "The Chora and the Great Church: Intervisuality in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople," *BMGS* 23 (1999): 72.

57 Ševčenko, "Marking Holy Time," 53.

considering that traditionally Sinai was under the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁵⁸ During the Crusades, the patriarchs of Alexandria had tried to place the boundary eparchies of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, including Sinai, under their own jurisdiction.⁵⁹ But soon after the capture of Jerusalem (1099), the extension of Frankish rule around the Gulf of Elat/Aqaba, and the inclusion of the Sinai peninsula in the lordship of Montréal in Transjordan (sometime in the mid-twelfth century), the crusaders reassigned the bishopric of Sinai to Petra and the abbot of Sinai, as an archbishop of Pharan, became its Latin archbishop's suffragan.⁶⁰ Subsequently, Sinai became the subject of permanent dispute between the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem; the eparchy changed hands several times, while politically it remained in the jurisdiction of Egypt.⁶¹

What, then, could be the reason for including the most sacred images of the Mother of God venerated in the sanctuaries of the Constantinople on an icon made in Sinai? And was their selection determined by historical or contemporary practices in the veneration of images? Most important in this respect may be the special significance of the Virgin in the middle Byzantine period.⁶² Of the large number of churches dedicated to her in Constantinople, one third were known for their miraculous icons of the Virgin.⁶³ The Mother of God was also closely linked with the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, which was called the Thorn Bush of the Holy Virgin from the very

beginning; this name continued to be used even after the relics of St. Catherine were moved to the monastery and it was consecrated in her name.⁶⁴ The chapel built on the site of the burning bush was named for the Holy Virgin.⁶⁵ Later, following Justinian's building of a basilica on the site,⁶⁶ this chapel became a sacred pilgrimage destination.⁶⁷ A multitude of Sinai icons—mostly of the post-Byzantine period—feature the Virgin, often depicted against a background that includes the thorn bush.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Virgin often appears on local

64 G. Kühnel, "Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters und verwandte Pilgerillustrationen," *OC* 45 (1981): 163–218. Tenth- to thirteenth-century Georgian sources connected with the Georgian monastic community on Mt. Sinai, in particular at the monastery of St. Catherine, refer to the monastic complex as the monastery of the Holy Virgin of the Burning Bush. The earliest reference is found in a testament dated 973, incorporated into an ascetic collection (Paterics) *Cod. Sin. Georg. 35*. Cf. Marr, *Opisanie gruzinskikh* (n. 9 above), 169. Important references to the monastery as the Monastery of the Holy Virgin of the Burning Bush are found in *Cod. Sin. Georg. N 39*, 10th century, a Tropologion (Z. Alexidze et al., *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975* [Athens, 2005], 278, 405); in *Sin. Georg. 70*, 12th–13th century, a Triodion (T. Chankiev and L. Djamaja, eds., *Kartul khelnatserta aghtseriloba, sinuri koleqtsia* [Description of the Georgian manuscripts: Sinai collection], vol. 2 [Tbilisi, 1979], 45); in *Sin. Georg. 77*, 13th–14th century, a Synodicon of the monastery (Javakhishvili, *Sinis mtis qartul khelnatserta aghtseriloba* [n. 9 above], 241–51; R. Gvaramia, H. Metreveli, Ts. Chankiev, L. Khevsuriani, L. Djamaja, eds., *Kartul khelnatserta aghtseriloba, sinuri koleqtsia* [Description of the Georgian manuscripts: Sinai collection], vol. 3 (Tbilisi, 1987), 169; D. Kldiashvili, *Kartuli samonastro sulta matianeobi* [Georgian monastic synodica], vol. 1, *Sinas tsm. ekaterines monastris qartvelia ekleisis sulta matiane* [Synodicon of the Georgian Church at the monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai] (Tbilisi, 2008), 40–41).

65 This is indicated in both Georgian and Byzantine written sources. Cf. *Mimosula anu Mgavroba Iona Ruisis Mitropolitisa* [The travels of Iona, metropolitan of Ruisi], ed. Pl. Ioseliani (Tbilisi, 1852), 93; P. Konchoshvili, *Mogzauroba Tsminda Kalaks Ierusalimsa da Tsminda Atonis Mtazed* [Travels to the holy city of Jerusalem and holy Mount Athos] (Tbilisi, 1901), 120; Uspenskii, *Pervoe puteshestvie v Sinaiskii monastyr v 1845 gody* (n. 58 above), 92.

66 Procopius, vol. 7, *Buildings*, trans. H. Dewing with G. Downey, Loeb (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), 5, 8.

67 Manafis, *Sinai*, 29–39.

68 D. Talbot Rice, "Tri Sinaiskikh Gory" [Three Sinai mountains], in *Vizantia, Iuzhnye Slaviane, Drevnaja Rus': Sbornik v Chest' V. N. Lazareva* [Byzantium, southern Slavs, ancient Rus: A collection dedicated to V. N. Lazarev] (Moscow, 1973), 173; K. Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *DOP* 28 (1974): fig. 54; Kühnel, "Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters," figs. 5 and 6; Manafis, *Sinai*, 225, fig. 100. For the list of the

58 P. Uspenskii, *Pervoe puteshestvie v Sinaiskii monastyr v 1845 gody* [The first visit to the Sinai monastery in 1845] (St. Petersburg, 1856), 138, 141; S. Runciman, *The Eastern Schism: A Study of the Papacy and the Eastern Churches during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Oxford, 1955), 107.

59 "Istoriya episkopii sv. Gory Sinaia, Ierusalimskogo Patriarkha Dosifeia" [The history of the bishopric of the holy Mount Sinai, by the patriarch of Jerusalem Dosytheos], *PPSb* 58, no. 2 (1909): 21–22.

60 H. E. Mayer, *Die Kreuzfahrerherrschaft Montréal (Sobak): Jordanien im 12. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1990), 52ff.; D. Jacoby, "Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Late Fifteenth Century," in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. R. S. Nelson and K. M. Collins (Los Angeles, 2006), 82.

61 J.-M. Mouton and A. Popesku-Belis, "Une description du monastère Sainte-Catherine du Sinaï au XII^e siècle: Le manuscrit d'Abū l-Makārim," *Arabica* 53, no. 1 (2006): 27–28.

62 Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother," 165–72.

63 N. Kondakov, *Ikonografija bogomateri*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Moscow, 1998), 33.

metalwork,⁶⁹ embroidery,⁷⁰ and lead seals,⁷¹ and she was represented on the official seal of the monastery.⁷² This local iconography must have served as the basis for pilgrim illustrations, widespread from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries.⁷³

Even if it was a considerable distance from the capital and under the jurisdiction of another church, the monastery at Sinai was long known for its special attitude to Constantinople. However, the relationship seems to have become closer in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The majority of the painted icons created on Sinai in this period clearly reflect Constantinopolitan artistic trends, so much so that it is often difficult to say whether an icon was originally created in the monastery or in the capital. The ties between Constantinople and Sinai are also evident in manuscripts and icons of the Komnenian period.⁷⁴

Together, the collection of images presented on the hexaptych's six panels form a pictorial prayer harmonious with the epigrams on the back and the donor's dedicatory inscription on the Last Judgment panel. Central themes expressed through the row of images of the Mother of God are the significance of the Incarnation, the Advent of the Savior in flesh, and the

importance of intercession before Him for future salvation. These are reinforced by the Christological cycle below the row of images of the Virgin, which includes miracles and healings of the Savior, essentially linked to future salvation, and the Last Supper and Washing of the Feet followed by a Passion cycle beginning with the Communion of the Apostles and ending with the Ascension. The combined cycles of Lent and Eastertide evoke the future advent of the Lord and Last Judgment; at the same time, it is significant that the cycle ends not with the Dormition, but with the Descent of the Holy Spirit, which must have had an ecclesiological connotation.⁷⁵

That the central image of the Virgin was inscribed with general descriptions in Greek and a specific description in Georgian underscores that the hexaptych was intended to be used by the local Georgian brethren in their church as a pictorial calendar, along with other objects necessary for divine service, whether donated or produced locally.⁷⁶ The creation of a pictorial calendar seems to have been part of the long-term project of the Georgian colony established at Sinai to increase the prominence of their community both at the monastery and within Eastern Christendom. This project had become particularly important by the tenth and eleventh centuries, and members of the royal court, the nobility, as well as secular and clerical representatives took part in its implementation. In the monastery of Saint Catherine, enhancing the chapel of Saint George—the principal sanctuary of the Georgians for centuries⁷⁷—was part of a concerted effort aimed at preserving Georgian identity while fully involving Georgians in the multicultural environment of Sinai. Activities such as translating and copying manuscripts and painting icons were coordinated with the local brethren to take into account the peculiarities of the monastic setting at Sinai. This is evident from both the style of the hexaptych and from the character of the Greek iambic verses.

eleventh- to fourteenth-century icons with bibliography see G. R. Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting in the Thirteenth Century," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy of St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. S. Gerstel and R. S. Nelson (Turnhout, 2010), 378–413; cf. also Manafis, *Sinai*, figs. 74, 82, 87, 93, 97, 98. It is notable that the Mother of God is frequently depicted on Sinai icons as the Kyriotissa according to the iconographic type represented in the conch of Hagia Sophia—precisely the Kyriotissa was recognized as the image of the Mother of God of the Burning Bush (G. Galavaris, "A Bread Stamp from Sinai and Its Relatives," *JÖB* 27 [1978]: 330–32; Kühnel, "Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters," 193–96, figs. 11, 21, 23, and 24; N. P. Ševčenko, "Virgin Nikopoios" and "Virgin tes Batou," *ODB* 3:2176, 2177–78.).

69 Manafis, *Sinai*, 291, fig. 16 (cover for a gospel book produced in the workshop of Kakheti/East Georgia in 1604 and donated to the monastery of St. Catherine by hieromonk Joachim Skordilis); O. Badley and E. Brunner, eds., *The Monastery of St. Catherine* (London, 1996), 34.

70 Manafis, *Sinai*, 243, 252, figs. 1 and 12. The Virgin is represented even on the *epitaphios* of St. Catherine (ibid., 246–47, fig. 4).

71 Ibid., 376, fig. 22.

72 Kühnel, "Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters," fig. 8.

73 Manafis, *Sinai*, 440–43; Cf. Z. Skhirtladze, "Four Images of Sinai in a Georgian Psalter," *Le Muséon* 119 (2006): 429–61.

74 K. Amantos, "Σύντομος ιστορία της Ιεράς Μονής του Σινά," *Ελληνικά* 3 (1953): 42–43; cf. Manafis, *Sinai*, 105.

75 Galavaris, *Eleventh-Century Hexaptych*, 140–41 (as in n. 1).

76 The differences between the Greek and Georgian inscriptions on the icons of the monastery of St. Catherine will be discussed in my monograph on the hexaptych, which addresses the activity of Georgians and the use of different languages in the multicultural environment of Sinai.

77 Kldiashvili, *Kartuli samonastro sulta matianeobi* (n. 64 above), 50–56.

Ultimately the Sinai hexaptrych can help to explicate the relationship between the monastic community on Sinai and the Byzantine capital and the goals of Sinai's Georgian community. Its central image of the Mother of God and its explanatory inscription—the earliest of the visual sources regarding the apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia—stand as eloquent testimony to these.

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